

Galveston News Building
2108 Mechanic Street
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas

HABS No. TX-289

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

GALVESTON NEWS BUILDING

Location: 2108 Mechanic Street, Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

Present Owner Galveston County Publishing Company.

Significance: The Galveston News is Texas' oldest surviving newspaper. This building was erected in 1883 and is locally believed to be the first structure designed expressly for the production of a newspaper. The architect, Nicholas Clayton, was probably the most notable 19th century Texas architect. Architecturally, the building is a good example of the neo-Renaissance style in vogue at the time.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1883-84
2. Architect: Nicholas J. Clayton. Clayton had worked in the firm of Jones and Baldwin in Memphis, Tennessee, just before and after the Civil War, and received his architectural training there. The firm had sent him to Galveston to supervise the construction of the First Presbyterian Church (recorded by HABS as TX-2106). Clayton remained in Galveston and became one of the State's outstanding nineteenth century architects. Some of his most notable work included the First Presbyterian Church, St. Mary's Infirmary, the Galveston Pavilion, Harmony Hall, University of Texas Medical School and several buildings in the Strand District.

In style, the News Building was considered a phase of the modern French Renaissance. Construction began in 1883 and was completed the following year, June 14, 1884 at a cost of \$125,000.

3. Builder, contractor and supplier: The red pressed brick and decorative details used in the front facade were manufactured by the Peerless Pressed Brick Company of Philadelphia.

The back and side walls which were two feet thick were constructed of Virginia Point machine-made brick (local manufacture) from Pritchard and George's brickyard.

The rolled iron I-beams were furnished by the Phoenix Iron Company of Philadelphia.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The News had its beginning in 1842 when Wilbur Cherry began publication of the paper in Galveston. Cherry was no editor, however, and soon hired Willard Richardson for the job. Under Richardson's hand the paper rapidly progressed and he was able to buy out Cherry's interest in 1843. Richardson soon developed the News into Texas' major paper. The influence of the News extended statewide and state circulation was greater than that of Galveston Island.

Colonel Alfred H. Belo was born in May 1839 at Salem, North Carolina. Following his service during the Civil War he came to Texas, arriving in June 1865. Belo immediately went to work for Richardson on the News and eventually purchased an interest in the paper. In 1875 following Richardson's death, Belo purchased full control of the paper.

In 1881 Belo formed the corporation of A. H. Belo and Company and embarked on a noted experiment the simultaneous publication of two major newspapers in cities 300 miles distant. This move resulted in the establishment of the Dallas News. Both papers maintained local departments but shared editorial writers, branch offices and press services and the experiment proved successful.

C. Bibliography:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Fornell, Earl W. The Galveston Era. University of Texas Press, 1961.

Galveston Evening Tribune. "A Souvenir of Galveston".
March 1893

Galveston News. June 14, 1889.

Barnstone, Howard. The Galveston That Was. New York: MacMillan Company, 1966.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architectural
Inventory
January, 1967

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building was a three story brick structure with an elaborately detailed facade. The facade abounded with ornamentation typical of the neo-Renaissance style.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The three-story building measures 50' x 120'.
2. Foundations: Foundations are probably brick piers. Excavation was carried to a depth of twelve feet and apparently a brick floor was laid. A sub-basement was reported as being plastered with Portland cement and the entire space used as a cistern with a capacity of 200,000 gallons.
3. Wall construction: The front facade was principally of red Philadelphia pressed brick with decorative details rendered in cream tinted, buff gray, and black molded brick and tiles. The sides and rear were 2' thick, of locally made brick.
4. Structural systems: Exterior mass masonry walls with an interior skeleton frame of rolled iron I-beam. Interior supports were fluted cast iron columns which were spanned by rolled iron girders. These in turn supported rolled iron I-beams and continuous brick vaults or arches were constructed between them. The arched brick masonry was also used for the roof.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Each bay of the ground floor was filled by double entrance doors.
 - b. Windows: Originally included ornate stained glass sections, since removed. Double-hung sash.
6. Roof: Originally paved with artificial stone flagging and coated with Trinidad asphalt concrete. An elaborate cornice was further surmounted by an aedicule with a small gable roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The first two floors were treated as a two-bay arcade. The ground floor facade was further divided by a subordinate arcade giving four bays. The upper floor facade consisted of paired piers and alternating windows. The building is rectangular in plan and

originally was divided in half by a transverse wall. The front room was devoted to offices and the rear was the press room. Job Composing was located on the second floor and the third was devoted to the composing room.

2. Stairway: Circular iron stair, locally manufactured.
3. Floor: Floors were concrete with wood flooring over.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Originally plaster.
5. Doors: Typical four panel wood doors.
6. Trim: Molded trim around all openings
7. Mechanical equipment
 - a. Hardware: Mortice locks.
 - b. Lighting: Electric fixtures, recent.
 - c. Heating: Originally by steam; natural gas in recent years.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: The building occupies lot 9, Block 621 and faces south on Mechanic Street

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of the HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.